



Interesting Facts



NPS / MICHAEL LARSON

Annual Visitation: 440,691 in 2019. Since 1923, the park has had over 45 million visitors.

Size: 46,766 acres, including over 33,000 acres designated wilderness

Location and Terrain: Southeastern New Mexico; Guadalupe Mountains (primarily limestone) and Permian Basin (primarily gypsum)

Elevation: About 3,600–6,370 feet (1,097–1,942 m) above sea level; Visitor center is at 4,400 feet (1,341 m).

How Many Caves are There in the Park: 120 caves known at this time. This number will change as exploration continues.

Size of Caves in the Park by Surveyed Length (as of 2020):

- **Lechuguilla Cave:** Over 150 miles (241.4 km); 1,612 feet (491.3 m) deep. Access to this cave is limited to research and scientific exploration only.
- **Carlsbad Cavern:** Over 32 miles (51.5 km); developed for public touring. Big Room is the largest readily accessible cave chamber in North America at 8.2 acres.
- **Spider Cave:** 5.8 miles (9.3 km); undeveloped.
- **Slaughter Canyon Cave:** 3.7 miles (6 km); minimally developed.

Surface Ecosystems: Chihuahuan Desert, with Pinyon-Juniper in higher elevations and shrub/grass lands in lower, home to over 750 plant species.

Wildlife:

- **Mammals:** 67 species
- **Bats:** 17 species known to live in the park; 3 species roost inside Carlsbad Cavern; largest colony is Brazilian free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), population estimated at about 400,000.
- **Birds:** 357 species. A large colony of cave swallows (*Petrochelidon fulva*), have nested just inside the cave entrance since 1966 and have been banded/studied for over 30 years.
- **Amphibians and Reptiles:** 54 species.

Scenic Drive: Walnut Canyon Desert Loop drive: scenic 9-mile (14.5 km) gravel road, near the visitor center. Low clearance vehicles, RVs, and trailers not permitted.

Picnic Area: Rattlesnake Springs Picnic Area, for day-use only, this 40-acre area is about 2.5 miles (4 km) off highway 62/180 (turn off is 5 miles (8 km) south of White's City). Tables, grills, restrooms, and water are available. Audubon Society designated birding sanctuary—a very popular with bird watchers.

Hiking Trails: Over 50 miles (80.5 km) of backcountry trails, minimally maintained; no dependable water sources in the backcountry; overnight back country camping allowed by permit only, free at the visitor center.

Paved Entrance Road: 7 miles (12.3 km) from Hwy 62/180 to visitor center through beautiful Walnut Canyon; with wayside exhibits.

Visitor Center: Educational exhibits, gift shop, cafeteria, bookstore, ticket counter, restrooms, theater, and information. (GPS location 32.174212°N; 104.445855°W)



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Significant Dates:

12,000 years ago	Prehistoric Indians populate the cavern vicinity.	1940	Sewage pumping system and flush toilets installed in cavern near Underground Lunchroom.
1400s	Mescalero Apaches come to the Guadalupe Mountains area.	1950s	Throughout Carlsbad Cavern, dirt trails and wooden stair systems are replaced with winding, paved trails.
1536	Cabeza de Vaca, the first of the Spanish explorers to cross southeastern New Mexico.	1952	Photographer Tex Helm takes the “Big Shot” photo of the Big Room using 2,400 flashbulbs. The photo later appears in National Geographic Magazine and is the largest flash photo ever taken.
1903	Guano mining begins in Carlsbad Cavern, then known as “Bat Cave.” Miners, including Jim White, explore the cavern and begin to tell about its wonders.	1954–1955	Second elevator shaft blasted and installation of larger capacity “passenger” elevators. These become the “primary” elevator system, while smaller original elevators become secondary.
1912	New Mexico is admitted to the Union as the 47th state.	1957	End of guano mining anywhere in Carlsbad Caverns National Park.
ca. 1915	Ray V. Davis photographs Carlsbad Cavern, which stimulates interest in the cavern.	1959	Construction of visitor center is completed.
1923	First official survey and mapping of cavern, performed by Robert Holly of General Land Office; his awe of the cavern and recommendations led to establishment as a national monument. Ray V. Davis’ photographs of the cavern appear in the New York Times.	1963	Bat Flight Amphitheater is constructed at the cave’s natural entrance to provide seating for visitors to view evening bat flight.
1923, October 25	President Calvin Coolidge creates Carlsbad Cave National Monument using the Antiquities Act.	1966	Discovery of Guadalupe Room, the second largest chamber in the main cave .
1924	Willis T. Lee leads a 6-month exploration of the cavern, sponsored by the National Geographic Society. He writes two articles that appear in the National Geographic Magazine, giving the cavern worldwide exposure.	1972	Self-guided tours of entire Cavern begin.
1925	Wooden stair system built through cavern’s natural entrance eliminates need for visitors to enter via guano bucket.	1976	New lighting system installed under the guidance of famed lighting designer Ray Grenald.
1926	First electric lights installed in Natural Entrance and King’s Palace.	1978	Under public law, 33,125 acres of Carlsbad Caverns National Park are designated as wilderness.
1927	First entrance road through lower part of Walnut Canyon constructed by State of New Mexico.	1981	The two guano shafts are sealed.
1928	First lunches (carried in from entrance by concession employees) served in cavern near Big Room Junction.	1985	Cavers use helium balloons to float a cord to the ceiling area in the Big Room in order to climb 255’ and discover an area later named “Spirit World.”
1930, May 14	Congress designates Carlsbad Caverns National Park.	1986	Cavers successfully open up “blowing leads” in Lechuguilla Cave, revealing a cave of still undetermined length. In 2020, its measured length is over 150 miles (241.4 km).
1930	Superintendent Thomas Boles and rangers discover Lake of the Clouds, the deepest point of the cavern.	1993	King’s Palace tours change to guided tours because excessive damage during twenty years it was self-guided.
1931	First elevator shaft blasted and infrastructure installed. oes into operation in January 1932.	1993–94	Scheduled “adventure tours” are started to Left Hand Tunnel, Lower Cave, Hall of the White Giant, and Spider Cave.
1937	New Cave (eventually named “Slaughter Canyon Cave”) discovered. Negotiations with guano company move all mining operations out of Carlsbad Cavern in exchange for mining privileges at New Cave for 20 years.	1995	Carlsbad Caverns National Park is designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.
1938	Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp established at Rattlesnake Springs to do construction projects in the main cavern and on the surface.	2008	New visitor center construction completed.
		2016	President Obama and the First Family visited the park. He is the first sitting President to visit.
		2018	Passenger elevators modernization completed.